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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the purpose, design, and impact of three specific governmental policy initiatives, instituted between 1981 and 1984, upon the role and function of the 15 community colleges in British Columbia. The three policies included the introduction of a provincial model for long-range planning, the establishment of a formula for funding college budgets, and the revision of the policies regarding eligibility for appointment to college boards. Each policy was examined to determine its rationale and the extent to which it attained its purposes. A further dimension of the study was to document those unanticipated effects which the policies brought to the operation of the institutions. The primary sources for determining the official intent of the policies were government reports and releases and the official record of the debate in the legislature. Interviews were conducted with chief executive officers, board members, middle management personnel, faculty members, and government officials to determine the perceived and measurable effects of the policies. Study findings included the following: (1) official rationales for policy initiatives were obtainable, and the undocumented reasons were equally accessible; (2) the implementation of the policies produced the initial impact which was intended, though the long-term impact was clearly tempered by practical realities, unanticipated obstacles, and interventions of higher priority; and (3) the overriding theme which entered either explicitly or implicitly into every discussion about government policy was that control over program development and upon overall cost of the college system was gradually becoming more firmly centered within the Ministry of Education. (EJV)

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Some Aspects of Government Policy Towards Community Colleges in British Columbia, 1982-86

- Intent and Effect -

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July, 1986

JC 860 566

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Introduction

The birth, growth and struggle for maturity of the community colleges in British Columbia, from the idealistic climate of the sixties to the fiscal conservatism of the eighties, has been documented by many observers (Smith, 1963; Soles, 1968; Jones, 1969; Wales, 1970; Campbell, 1971; Bennett, 1973; Brown, 1973; Dennison, 1979; Hollick-Kenyan, 1979; Beinder, 1984; Dennison and Gallagher, 1986). It has been a story of rapid growth, of essential maintenance, and more recently, of strategic reduction. The development of the college system is also a reflection of how much the fortunes of social organizations are entwined with the fiscal health and policy priorities of governments.

Colleges, more than universities, are, in matters of funding and control, responsible directly to provincial governments. In each of Canada's provinces, college systems were established within periods of new initiatives in public policy in regard to the expansion of access to advanced education. In some regions--Ontario, New Brunswick, or Saskatchewan, for example--the gestation period of development was relatively short. In other constituencies, such as British Columbia, Newfoundland and Alberta, growth was slower, even erratic, as policy evolved more gradually.

British Columbia's colleges were originally assigned a largely socio-cultural role in the spirit of "democratization of educational opportunity", as the theme of the sixties was expressed. By the early nineteen eighties, however, government expectations of colleges had not only changed, but had emerged in explicit form;

> Two fundamental objectives of the B.C. college (and institute) system are to ensure that British Columbians have reasonable and equitable

> access to postsecondary education, and that programs be of high quality. These objectives remain central in the province's ongoing development of the postsecondary education system as a part of its economic development strategy", (brackets and italics added) (Fisher, 1985).

There were many factors which contributed to this new role for colleges as interpreted by government, but most prominent was the escalating spiral of government expenditure, which emerged from the expansionary phase of the sixties, later to become dramatized through the spectre of accumulating deficits. At all levels of government, expenditures came under critical review. The recession which began in Canada during the late seventies merely exacerbated this concern.

A second factor was related to changing public attitudes towards postsecondary education, and the non-university sector in particular. The human capital theories (Schutz, 1961; Becker, 1964; Economic Council of Canada, 1964) which had fuelled the initial expansion of the system fell into disrepute (Stager, 1982). The "training for employment" role for colleges was assigned a higher priority as government perceived its potential return from investment in advanced education in more direct terms.

These, and other factors, contributed to a new relationship between government and postsecondary education, which placed the former much more firmly at the helm of the latter's development. In British Columbia, during the early eighties, a group of new policy initiatives emerged from the Ministry

of Education, all of which impinged in somewhat different, but interrelated ways upon the ongoing activities of the individual institutions.

This study was designed to assess the purpose, design and impact of three specific policy initiatives of government, instituted between 1981 and 1984, upon the role and function of the fifteen community colleges in British Columbia. As described later, the three policies included the introduction of a provincial model for long range planning; the establishment of a formula for funding college budgets; and a revision of the eligibility for appointment to college boards.

In each case the policy will be examined to determine its rationale, and from the point of view of both the planners and the implementors of the particular policy, to assess the degree to which it attained its purposes. A further dimension to the study is to document those unanticipated effects, if any, which the policies brought to the operation of the institutions.

Some Theoretical Considerations

As will be noted in the descriptions of the three policy initiatives under investigation, the actions taken are not only interdependent, but are also part of a much wider planning process. Government planning is of itself a complex exercise which is limited by constraints not characteristically found within the private sector. These constraints require comment if the remainder of this paper is to be placed within a contextual framework.

Levin (1985) notes that planning by government is based upon political and social, rather than technical considerations. Governments react to public

pressures from one or more groups, in a manner relatively consistent with their own political ideology. Because pressure groups are issue oriented, government response is in kind, and planning is reflected through policy objectives which have wide social appeal, i.e., "coordination of institutional programs", "cost effectiveness and increased productivity", or "to ensure the immediate relevance of occupational training to the needs of the workplace". In Levin's view..., "the test of policy, then, must be not only its effectiveness, but the perceptions which it must engender as well" (p. 8).

In the planning process, however, it is important to distinguish between the role of the political sector, the elected members of the legislature, operating specifically through the legal authority of the Minister, and the civil servants who are charged with translating broad issue related policy into technical and operational terms. Again, as Levin (1985) observes, civil servants are responsible for programs, whereas politicians are responsible to people.

It is within this structural gap, the issue based expression of policy, and the program orientation of the implementation process, that many of the pitfalls of government planning reside.

Under what conditions do governments act? Presumably, if political barometers are stable or rising, if public perception of the effectiveness, or relevance, of social organizations is positive, governments are reluctant to initiate change. So long as public values and government priorities coincide,

social institutions enjoy relative autonomy or at worst, benign tolerance, in their ongoing pursuit of stated goals.

On occasion, governments sense impending pressures from societal groups powerful enough to warrant attention, and plan policies which anticipate public demand (Kirby and Kroeker, 1978). If their judgment is accurate, such governments earn the highest accolade of all--retention of power!

Whatever the motivation, the British parliamentary system provides elected governments with the capacity for instituting immediate, authoritative, and virtually unbridled planning directives within the legislative process. Cabinet is the policy making structure. The legislature is then important only insofar as the cabinet is responsible to it (Doern and Aucoin, 1971).

It is the ingredients of policy, and its implementation, however, which occupy the central focus of this paper, and some discussion of the theoretical nature of that topic is warranted.

In the literature relating to public policy a large number of definitions abound, but several (Easton, 1965; Dye, 1972; Doern and Aucoin, 1971) refer to the identification and allocation of societal values by governments charged with the task. A comprehensive definition of policy is provided by Jenkins (1978), who describes it as "A set of inter-related decisions taken by a political actor, or group of actors, concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where these decisions should, in principle, be within the power of these actors to achieve." Clearly, it is difficult to separate policy from politics, and the nature of any policy initiative is a practical expression of the ideology

of the political system in place. As Manzer (1985) observes, "the elements of ideological thinking are concepts of human need and political good."

As a framework for assessing the impact of the policies selected for study in this paper, the work of Simeon (1976) provides a useful conceptual basis. Simeon assumes that policy makers, in this case the provincial government, work within a framework which limits access to highly innovative solutions to the problems identified. The factors which influence this framework are the social and economic environment, the system of power, the prime values of the society, and the existence of the institutions and their structures.

In attempting to assess the impact of specific policies, it is possible to adopt the Simeon framework by focusing upon the shift occurring over two time periods, before and during the imposition of the policy, and within three dependent variables.

1. The nature of the policy. What did the government do? How was this different?
2. The methods adopted by government to impose policy.
3. The distributive mechanisms, i.e., What is the nature and extent of change? What is gained or lost by the change?

All of the foregoing is, of course, a matter of judgment in that policy implementation involves continuous interaction among individuals, systems or organizations, and the wider environment.

It is on the basis of these conceptual frameworks that the analysis of the specific policies concerned in this study was carried out.

Methodology

Discussion of research into policy analysis introduces several possible approaches (Doern and Aucoin, 1971). Largely because of the wide range of opinion on what actually constitutes policy, the techniques involve a "field analysis" format, either by studying policy in the broad context of the political system, or by using a case study methodology which deals more directly with specific actions.

Given the focus of this study, i.e., the impact of selected policies upon the operation of selected institutions of postsecondary education, the case study method seems most appropriate, largely because generalizability is limited by the uniqueness of the subject. The colleges in British Columbia have developed a culture of their own, which distinguishes them from the more traditional universities, or even the vocational "institutes".

The process of data gathering in policy research also tends to fall into two categories--through distribution of surveys, or by direct interview techniques using a combination of structured and open ended questioning formats. Both theoretical considerations and the practical experience of the researcher indicate that policy analysis in this context revolves around the perception of the actors involved. Perceptions are often difficult to extract, particularly when they are partly or wholly inconsistent with policy as formally promulgated. Hence, carefully directed personal interviews seemed to be the most appropriate methodology to adopt.

In fact, one of the first problems to be overcome in this study was to determine just what was the precise policy being invoked. The primary sources for determining the "official" intent of government were a series of reports,

announcements, position papers, press releases, and related documentation issued from the ministry involved. A second major source was the official record of debate in the legislature (Hansard, 1983) which, unfortunately, was limited to policy addressed through legislative changes. The Minister's comments, particularly in responses to opposition questions, proved to be enlightening.

However, the real confusion arose after hearing the "unofficial" side of the policy position. The sources for the latter involved all of the individuals interviewed, including the public servants charged with the implementation of the policy. On occasion, cynicism was not too strong a word to describe comments regarding the "gap" between the published and the interpreted versions of the policy under review.

After establishing the range of interpretations of the policy position, the next task was to "field test" both the perceived and measurable effects of policy upon the operation of the institutions. Inevitably, variation in policy interpretation became the subject of extensive comment during this stage.

The interviews involved an extensive period of time with individuals generally selected for their experience, degree of involvement with the college system, and overall understanding of the issues. This group included ten chief executive officers, seven board members, six middle management personnel, six faculty members and five senior ministerial representatives. No individual refused to be interviewed. All were open and highly cooperative. Interviews were conducted "on site" and the time for each ranged from 48 minutes to two hours and ten minutes.

Perhaps the most surprising element of the interview process was the high degree of agreement on substantive questions. Both the "official" and "perceived" views of policy each drew virtually unanimous agreement. The only real variation in response arose in regard to the degree to which the policy implementation affected college operations. However, it must be conceded that most individuals were quick to place "value" upon the consequences of the policies and the range was from an "excellent change--long overdue" to "absolutely destructive to the college concept".

The policy issues

A. Integrated Five Year Planning for the British Columbia College and Institute System: System Objectives 1982-87.

Long term planning is by no means a recent activity in British Columbia's colleges. The majority of the institutions had prepared statements of their missions, program projections, and "service to the community" intentions from their earliest days. Some plans were detailed, optimistic "wishlists", prepared after extensive consultation with elements within and beyond the colleges. Other "plans" were short, generalized "action statements", intended to provide a measure of planning direction. Similarly, mission statements of varying degrees of specificity appeared in institutional calendars and brochures.

At the same time, several college presidents and board members had expressed concern over the lack of direction from the Ministry regarding the

latter's expectations of the colleges about the range and type of programs and services which they were to provide. Part of the problem arose from an increasing lack of predictability over which programs would be approved and funded.

A second complication was created by the perception that colleges, after the elimination of local funding, appeared to be moving from a community, toward a more provincial, orientation.

In March, 1982 the Ministry produced its integrated five year plan which articulated a mission statement, a set of eight specific goals for the college system, and an accompanying set of objectives for each goal. For the first time the term "system" was given an explicit meaning and the individual colleges were designated as components of the system.

Following a number of drafts and revisions, the Ministry's plan was finalized in 1983 and colleges were required to produce individual five year plans, using a format consistent with the overall Ministry approach.

In order to determine the policy thrust which initiated the production of the planning document, it is necessary to analyze the preamble and assumptions upon which the Ministry plan was produced.

In summary, the factors which contributed to the production of the planning document could be identified as follows. (Ministry of Education, 1983).

a. The increase in growth and complexity of the non-university, postsecondary educational "system", including the new distance education arrangements.

b. A "general recognition" of the need for increased provincial coordination.

c. A shortage of "critical skills" in certain occupations essential to the province's economic growth.

d. Increasing difficulty in funding social services, including education, with an accompanying need to make more efficient use of resources available.

e. A recognition that cost effective education involves long range planning of resources and clearer definition of roles.

In light of the above, it appears that colleges were to become more responsive to government expectations at both the federal and provincial level. However, there was also an intention reflected in the documentation which suggested that the planning model would have been implemented, irrespective of any anticipated reduction in financial resources available to the system in the future.

While the foregoing represented the "official" version of the policy thrust, virtually all those interviewed expressed the view that the "real" intent, while not totally inconsistent with the former, was certainly less complex. The opinion of the experts was that greater control over the direction and magnitude of growth in the system necessitated a commensurate increase in the central authority of the Ministry of Education.

The Effects of the Policy:

The collated views of the interviewees regarding the impact of the five year planning policy could be summarized as follows:

1. The direct impact was negligible, but there were a number of indirect or "psychological" effects. The plan tended to place the institutions in a "maintenance" mode which elevated the future goals of the college system upon a more public forum.

2. As five years were viewed as a "lifetime" in a planning sense, given the unpredictable fluctuation in overall resources available to the system, the colleges tended to regard their plans as optimistic at best, and at worst frustrating and anxiety raising for those who anticipated a particular scenario for the future.

3. The strong feeling in the college community was that the Ministry paid little attention to individual college plans, but responded to its own "system" plan. Colleges whose plans were most congruent with the Ministry's model were given greater recognition in the program approval process.

4. As the Ministry's approval of program development is regarded as critical to the realization of an institution's plan, political factors were seen to play a role. On occasion, a program initiated from the Ministry will turn out to be unpopular with students, as reflected in low enrollment, to the frustration of the college.

5. Within the individual institutions the planning process has produced a number of perceived benefits. Mandates, and changes in mandates, are made more public. The required "environmental scan" of the college region leads to identification of new needs and new constituencies. And, in colleges where planning is widely shared, an increased sense of coordinated mission prevails.

In summary, the planning process seems to have realized a measure of its intent by creating a more centralized, coordinated sense of direction within the system. Individual institutional plans often tend to be ignored, or "forcefitted", to meet system goals. Planning, as a process, is turned on and off as circumstances demand, whereas the notion of a five year perspective is generally regarded as unrealistic in the light of funding instability.

Finally, there was a feeling that by constant changes in the direction and priorities in planning, the Minister and the Ministry had subverted the confidence of the college sector in the planning process, per se.

B. The Introduction of Formula Funding

Following the abolition in 1983 of the buffer organizations, or Councils, responsible for allocating funds to the colleges, the responsibility for funding returned to the Minister of Education.

Recognizing that funding to that date had followed a basically incremental and largely unsystematic process, both the Ministry and the institutions sought an approach which would be perceived as more equitable and more predictable with regard to resource allocation.

Intent of the formula funding policy:

Again it is necessary to differentiate between the stated "official" rationale for the introduction of formula funding, and the more blunt, more personalized perspective offered by many of those interviewed. With regard to the former, the following intentions are reflected in various relevant documents. (McCandless, 1986).

a. The need for a fairer, more objective, and more equitable resource allocation process.

b. The recognition that budget announcements should allow for greater lead time, be more predictable, be based upon recognized understood criteria, and be more "open" regarding how the budget was determined.

c. That colleges be more accountable for budget disbursement, that allocation be based upon performance rather than future aspirations, but that at the same time boards be given greater autonomy in the internal distribution of fiscal resources.

d. Although not stated explicitly, it seems evident that funding is intended to be linked to planning to constitute a more coordinated approach to the development of the higher education system.

On the other hand, the "unofficial" view of the intent of the new funding policy, expressed in general terms by the vast majority of respondents, was that it was intended that greater power be extended to the Ministry to "steer" the direction and scope of programs within the system, to increase cost effectiveness, to upgrade productivity, and to give greater fiscal priority to programs consistent with the overall provincial plan. Part of the process of budget setting lies in the "program profile" negotiations between the individual institution and the Ministry, through which the pattern of programs to be funded is established. This last exercise is really the critical step in the entire process and upon it the ultimate level of allocation of funds to a college will be based.

The funding formula

In reality, the formula is a distributive resource allocation mechanism rather than a "funding" exercise. Its structure is complex and not relevant to this essay. Suffice to say that it is program-specific, and based upon

established full-time-equivalent (FTE) enrollment quotas. It does include a variety of adjustments, including those stemming from geographic isolation and economies of scale.

Although the structure of the formula is objectively designed, the unknown is the dollar figure which is finally attached to funded units and which is dependent upon the overall allocation of funds to the system in general. Indeed, a good deal of the criticism levelled at the formula is misdirected in that problems caused by underfunding are often attributed to the introduction of the formula, rather than to their real source, the overall reduction of resources to the college system in general.

Impact of the funding formula policy

1. Much greater equity within equivalent program costs among various colleges has emerged. Colleges are more aware of how much programs should, and do, consume in resources. The result is a broader and more complete understanding of this part of the budgetary process within an institution.

However, there is another side to the above. Limited opportunity for experimentation and innovation within designated programs exist, unless the process becomes a cost saving measure. Furthermore, the Ministry has retained a degree of freedom to distribute additional funding through various devices, e.g., "funds for excellence", fiscal allocations for particular purposes, support of satellite campus operations, etc. There was strong feeling expressed by institutional representatives that the retention of funds for specific purposes tended to erode the basic principle of equity through the formula and at the

same time allowed for a perception that political factors influence allocations.

2. With respect to its impact upon the instructional program, the funding formula has led to increased productivity expressed through larger class sizes, expanded teaching loads, and also reduced opportunity for professional development and educational leave for the instructional staff. Further, there has been an equalization effect upon collective agreements, a factor also influenced by legislated salary stabilization controls.

In addition, the reduction of resources has limited, and in some cases reduced, needed growth of support services such as counselling, library, study skill centres and similar activities. The opportunity for colleges to offer programs in satellite campuses has also been more limited, with some substitution through distance learning arrangements.

In the light of the foregoing, questions of quality inevitably arise. Some claim that the formula ignores quality at the expense of increased productivity. Others see little real evidence of quality deterioration. In general, there is not a great amount of conclusive evidence to fully substantiate either point of view.

3. With respect to student interests, the dependence upon F.T.E. as the critical funding factor inevitably impacts upon general accessibility to programs and also upon opportunity for part-time study. Institutions negotiate enrollments by program, they are not better funded for accepting more students, and, while there is some variation by program, part-time students are not always financially productive.

Further, as a result of productivity factors noted earlier, some students receive reduced instructional time within certain courses and are also

affected by limitations upon student services. Also, as the only financial resource under institutional control, tuition fees have risen.

In summary, the intent of formula funding policy has been generally realized. Budget allocation is less of a mystery to all segments of the college community; a predictable common denominator has been introduced which suggests equitable treatment for particular programs; there is a perception that political influences upon basic funding have been lessened; and there is a widespread quantitative understanding of what a program should cost.

At the same time there is widespread belief that the Ministry, through the "program profile" approval process, is in a position to steer the system, particularly with respect to program development. Fiscal control is much more centralized than in earlier periods.

It was stated that there is little incentive for colleges to abandon, or convert resources from weaker programs, on the assumption that funding will not be restored. On the other hand, unapproved imaginative program development is not rewarded. Uneven fiscal treatment of different programs is seen to reflect ministerial priority. It is true that flexibility exists for colleges to redirect resources within institutional program areas, but this is also an uncertain practice. During the subsequent periods of budget negotiations, ministerial views of an institution's internal funding practices may influence the ultimate allocation of resources. In effect, colleges are gambling that their fiscal decisions regarding internal reallocation of resources will be approved eventually by Ministry negotiators.

There was also some anticipation that, after a period of gradual adjustment to bring all institutions into an equitable funding arrangement,

more "block" grants would be made available--a decision which colleges see as restoration of greater fiscal autonomy!

C. The Policy of Changing Board Membership

This policy, the third to be investigated, involved the removal from college governing board membership of individuals previously included as members or representatives of school boards which form part of the college region.

Prior to 1983 the college board had comprised two categories of membership, government appointees and school board nominees. Legislation introduced in 1983 confined college board membership to those appointed by government. Unlike the other two policy initiatives, this one resulted from legislative amendment and the record of debate in the legislature reveals "official" ministerial intent.

A summary of the Hansard (1983) remarks indicates that the "official" rationale for the policy initiative on board membership included the following:

a. The introduction of full provincial funding of the colleges in 1977 removed the local financial contribution raised through the mechanism of the school board taxing base. Hence, direct school board involvement in financing was no longer necessary.

b. As some college regions encompassed a large number of individual school districts, a college board which included representation from all school boards could be quite large in number, i.e., over twenty members. These large boards were impractical and needed to be reduced in size.

c. Experience had allowed college boards to gain considerable maturity and they should accordingly be awarded sufficient autonomy to conduct their own affairs without dependence upon the involvement of school boards. In effect, the relationship between college and school boards had weakened through time.

d. The loss of experience within the college board encountered by the removal of school board nominees could be compensated by the reappointment of such individuals as government nominees.

Despite the "official" rationale, whose legitimacy was acknowledged by the interviewees, a majority argued that another factor was a prime motivator of the policy change. This factor was the tendency of some school board appointees on college boards to become somewhat outspoken critics of government policy and practice. Their role as college board members provided, in some cases, a forum for politically motivated behavior, or simply attracted public attention to legitimate college problems in others. As school boards are elected directly, government had little control over their composition; hence the change to total government appointment on the college board.

While there is obviously no documented argument to support this second rationale, the frequency of reference provides it with a certain legitimacy.

The impact of the policy change:

Assessment of the impact of the policy change regarding board membership was difficult to conduct. Opinion was more divided and generally more indefinite than with the two previous policies. Much of the source of data lay with current and retired college board members, whose perspective is

necessarily limited in its objectivity. Even some senior administrators, with extended experience of board activity, were undecided. It may well be that further time should elapse before a more valid analysis can be conducted.

However, there were a number of observations worthy of comment.

1. The newly constituted boards display less divisiveness and greater unity within their perspectives on issues. In line with the foregoing, some saw the boards to be more efficient in conducting their business. Certainly, many boards were reduced in size, which was seen to add efficiency.

2. An intriguing dimension to the discussion of "new" board membership was the view that appointed board members, most of whom reflect a particular political ideology, would be far more effective advocates for their colleges with government if they chose to take advocacy positions. In other words, governments have difficulty in resisting pressure from their "friends". The task was, however, for college interest groups to convince board members of the value and "rightfulness" of advocacy.

3. Breadth of representation on boards proved to be a matter of concern. The latter was expressed with regard to the geographical constituency of some board members, their lack of diversity in occupational and socio-economic background, and their common ideological orientations. College communities were perceived as being far more diverse in many respects than the profiles of board members would indicate.

The view of most respondents, however, was that effectiveness of board members in all respects rested upon the individuals, their calibre, their personality and their dedication and commitment to bettering the fate of their

institutions. The change in membership categories, it was said often, really changed very little. Nevertheless, there was concern that the greater degree of ideological homogeneity among board members inevitably imposed limits upon the range of viewpoints on many issues relating to the role of the colleges.

4. The link, or loss of linkage, with school districts also drew mixed response. To some, who perceived the need to retain articulation through the entire education system, the loss of direct school district contact was seen as detrimental. To others, the need for school board members to participate in college boards as another community voice was regarded as an anachronism. In fact, comment regarding the degree of regional representation on college boards was also mixed and depended upon the particular college area under review.

In all, the reaction concerning the impact of this policy was more diverse than in the case of the first two under study. Perception appeared to be the overriding factor, and perception was diversified. Perhaps the answer lies embedded within one much repeated response, i.e., the personal qualities of individual board members were more critical than any other qualification. The popular belief that board members were mere mouthpieces for the provincial government was not sustainable. Neither, however, was the opinion that board members were their "own persons", on each and every issue.

Concluding Comment

Throughout the entire study, the issue of financial restraint, or underfunding of college activities, consistently intruded into the discussion. Attitudes around this issue translated into lowered states of morale, increased levels of cynicism, and even an occasional expression of an opposing

view that colleges were adequately funded but less than efficient management of resources was the "real" problem.

Although this study was not designed to address the adequacy of funding issue, it soon became evident that funding was intricately linked with opinion about the impact of long term planning and formula funding policies.

It is possible to take the position that, when the overall college budget was growing, planning and formulae for resource allocation would present no critical problems. Again, it could be argued that much of the criticism of the policy issues was misdirected and should have been laid at the real source of difficulty--the inadequate overall college budget! This entire issue deflected the central thrust of the study.

Notwithstanding the foregoing caveat, the study invited some interesting conclusions...

1. Policy initiatives in postsecondary education fit all the caveats on policy research noted at the beginning of this paper. Political and social forces override technical considerations. The language of policy is the language of politics, but the implementation of policy--the business of civil servants--is tempered by "problems of practical workability".

2. "Official" rationales for policy initiatives were obtainable, sometimes not without difficulty. Furthermore, the undocumented reasons for the same policies were equally accessible, and generally consistent. The relationship between the official and unofficial rationales was not necessarily contradictory, but did introduce new motivations for the particular policy.

3. Implementation of policies generated a number of effects, some predictable, others less so. If considered on a "value-free" basis, the policies investigated in this study did produce the initial impact which was intended. In the long term, however, the planning exercise and the introduction of formula funding were clearly tempered by practical realities, unanticipated obstacles, and interventions of higher priority.

4. The issues facing British Columbia's community colleges are many and complex. In spite of the constraints on this particular study, however, there was one overriding theme which entered either explicitly or implicitly into every discussion which centred upon government policy in a general context. This theme was that control over program development and, ultimately, upon overall cost of the college system was gradually becoming more firmly centred within the Ministry of Education (later Postsecondary Education). In each of the three specific policy initiatives studied, the ultimate intent in the view of virtually all respondents was the location of power directly or, in the case of board membership, indirectly in the hands of the Minister and the Ministry.

This tendency to relocate the locus of power is consistent with overall government approach in British Columbia, particularly since 1983. The elimination of nonelected buffer agencies, the introduction of new cost accounting procedures, the emphasis upon productivity and accountability measures, and the trend towards centralized planning, are all initiatives which ultimately put government in greater control of the financial structure of the public sector.

In the case of the community colleges, this trend has brought a particular reaction from those sensitive to the early years of the colleges, with their history of community orientation and decentralized control over program development, labor relations, and fiscal priorities. There is little doubt that the "character" of the British Columbia college system has changed. Whether the changes have led to greater accessibility to further education for a wider cross-section of society; whether colleges have grown more responsive to employer groups, to business and industry, or to various social agencies; whether productivity increases translate into higher quality of instruction or increased relevancy of programs; whether colleges are managed more efficiently and effectively; and whether there is a more clear and understood sense of direction and purpose within the college system, are all questions which invoke passionate, but generally as yet unquantifiable responses. Nevertheless, they are also issues critical to the future of postsecondary education in British Columbia.

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